

THE SERPENT'S TAIL



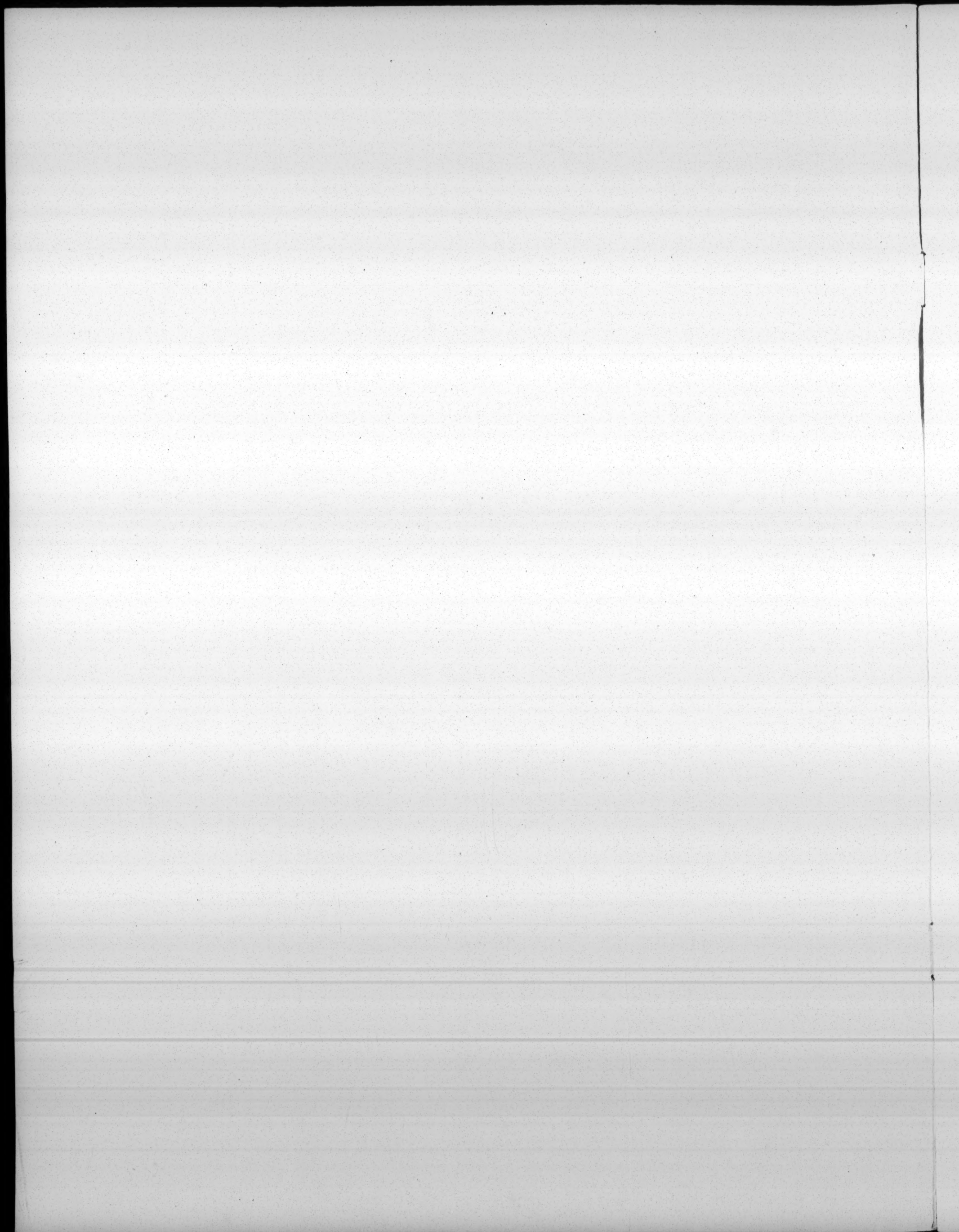
*A Local, Community-Based Alternative
Published in Milwaukee!*

Yule
Candlemas
1990-1991

\$1.50

A Seasonal Journal to
help carry us through
the Transition. Come
join the Earthdwellers,
Rhythmakers, and
Transformation
Dancers!







The Serpent is an ancient symbol that has been revered by many cultures from China to India to native North America. It represents the image of the life force in the field of space and time, continually throwing off death and being reborn. As the snake sheds its skin to be born again, so too does life shed its generations one after the other and create new ones. The serpent is in the form of a circle eating its own tail, as does life live by killing and eating of itself, dying and rebirthing, like the moon casts its shadow to become full again. The serpent thus is a representation of the primal mystery and paradox of life.

The ancients recognized that the Earth had various energy lines and their connecting nodules that also corresponded to the nervous systems of Earth creatures. These energy lines were perceived as winged serpent or dragon tracks which carried power from one place to the other. These so-called "ley-lines" were traced across our planet from the menhirs of the neolithic people in England and Ireland (where mysterious "circles" are suddenly appearing today) to the Dragon Vein Processions in Asia to the Great Serpent Mound in prehistoric Ohio.

We once again recognize the connections between the macrocosm and the microcosm, between our bodies and the Earthbody so that we can try to keep in harmony with the Earth as Gaia, as a Serpent Force; a living organism with a delicate balance and narrow parameters between life and death.

Mission Statement

"Seasons" is a collective that publishes The Serpent's Tail, a quarterly seasonal journal that has been conceived to evoke planetary consciousness, the reverence of Natural Laws and advocates a wholistic and balanced approach to all things. We believe that human beings are not meant to take "Dominion of the Earth" as written in the patriarchal Bible, but are a part of the Great Web of Life in which all creatures are interdependent. Of imminent importance is the preservation of our planet, of Earthmother, for it is Her body that sustains us. We are endangering our planet and therefore ourselves through overpopulation, the burning of fossil fuels and other consequences of the Industrial Revolution. The forces that have driven the modern industrial consumer world will have to reckon with the "life out of balance" (Koyaanisqatsi) they have created. Prometheus's act of stealing fire caused him to be condemned by the Gods for upsetting the natural order. Any favoring of manmade laws over Natural Laws or any favoring of human life over other co-creatures will cause imbalance. Thus it is better to utilize the planet's natural sun, wind and water energy for fuel. When considering our planet, we should "Let it Be" as much as we can.

The Natural Laws are the governing principle behind everything and apply to us all. The world of form, of creation, is the process that unfolds according to the underlying Natural Laws. Power comes from knowing which direction the flow is going and acting accordingly. Therefore, it is wise to observe and consider these laws and work with them.

One of these Natural Laws is the Law of Polarity. This Law states that all things contain their complementary opposite. As a pendulum that swings too much in one direction and therefore must swing back again, any over-determined action in any one area will produce its exact opposite or polarity. By studying the Law of Polarity, we realize paradoxically that freedom comes from obedience to the Natural Order, power comes through cooperation, the wise leader leads without coercion, independence comes through service and greatness is achieved through selflessness.

In order for a change in outside manifestation to take place, there first must be a change of consciousness within. The greatest is reflected in the smallest and vice versa. We are on the path in search for new explanations to the age-old Great Mysteries. We are looking to Science for our Creation Myths as the 2000 year-old book is no longer valid for our times. We therefore are asking our readers to help rewrite the old myths that no longer reflect the "Zeitgeist" that we live in and create the mythology that will determine the New Aeon as we enter the turning of the Millenium.

As Above. So Below



Yule: Call of the Hearth and Heart

December 21st this year marks the day of the Winter Solstice. Darkness falls earliest as the Sun sets to mark the shortest day of the year, hence the longest night. From this turning point of the Winter Solstice, the hours of sunlight will gradually increase as the returning Sun grows ever stronger.

At this point in the year we celebrate the festival of Yule, a festival of light, and joyfully honor this turn of the seasons as the Yuletide. Although Yule falls in the dark half of the year, it celebrates the rebirth of the solar year with the reemergence after the longest night of the year.

Craft folk everywhere celebrate this high point of the year as the rebirth of the Sun will bring forth new life in the Spring, though only after the cold, reflective rest of Winter.

For many, Yule is celebrated with family and friends drawn close. Though we humans don't actually hibernate in our times of reflection, we are generally drawn more indoors this season

and so may choose to share this time with those we hold dear.

The following ritual to acknowledge and honor the Rebirth of the Light is designed to be shared with (extended) family. The extended family we work and play with range in age from 45 to 1 1/2.

For preparation of the ritual space, line the circumference of the circle with luminarias, perhaps with snowflake or pentagram designs - or - white or brown bags with a couple inches of sand and tealights or votives will do just fine. Red tapers or votive candles are placed at the four cardinal points plus at the central altar to represent the direction of Spirit. Two additional tapers to represent the god and goddess should flank the central Spirit candle.

The altar placement and arrangement is somewhat different in that there is one central or "hearth" altar. The purpose for this is multi-fold: the group gathers around the altar (the heart of the circle), drawing closer to the center (spirit direction).

strengthening the bond of family and community spirit as they gather to celebrate. Also the "cakes and wine" or libation portion of the ritual may be in the form of feast food and drink or "holiday goodies", as the cakes and wine portion of the ritual is to be extended in holiday festive revelry, along with a gift exchange if the group so desires. To build the hearth altar, a round or oval altar cloth, red or white, should be placed in the center of the circle. A large round or oval table for a raised altar may be used, but I envision the altar to be at foot level. A red taper fitted securely into a holder should be placed in the center of the altar. This candle represents the "element" of spirit. Around the base of the spirit candle rests a crown fashioned for the (newborn) Sun King. This crown may be made from garland or shiny cloth or whatever you feel exemplifies the brightness and strength of the Sun.

As an alternative arrangement for the Spirit direction, a representative Yule log may be placed at center, perhaps with holders for the three candles notched out of it. The purpose of the Yule log is to light the way for the Sun's return, and is tended with care during the several day cycle of the Solstice out of reverence and to ensure the return of the Sun's warmth. After the ritual, this log may be taken away to be burned or - should your feast area be apart from the hearth altar - the log and candles can be removed to grace the feast table and keep the Yule fire burning.

White votive candles (unlit) may be placed around the edges of the cloth. More fresh pine, mistletoe,* holly, etc. may

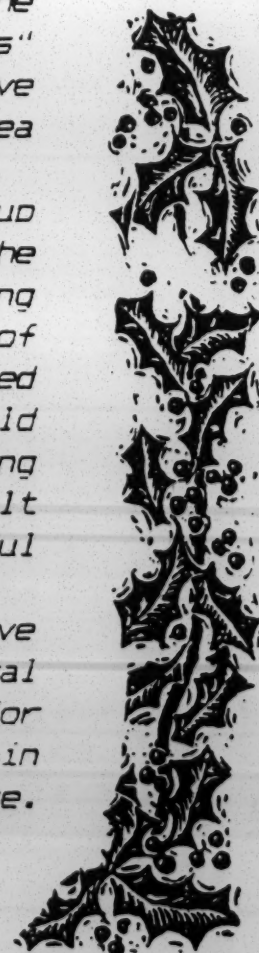
be placed inside the votive ring. Decorated packages for a gift exchange may be placed within the greenery, if you include gift-giving as part of the ritual. A string of sleigh or jingle bells, oil of pine, incense of pine, pine and frankincense, or your own special blend should be available on the North portion of this altar, along with salt and spring water, a censer and any other ritual tools you may use. A Yule tree of evergreen, that cherished symbol representing life ongoing in times of dormancy, may bedeck your Yuletide temple.

The ritual food and drink plus all needed service should be placed away to the North to be easily transportable to the central altar at the time of merriment. Further thoughts on the ritual food: some may want to keep this very simple - say a plate of those charming decorated cookies your mother and grandma make; along with a holiday beverage...maybe wassail or eggnog or hot spiced cider. Others may want a more elaborate family feast, in which case depending on the arrangements of your ritual space and the requirements of the "readiness" of the food, you may want to move the altar to your feast area rather than vice versa.

A member of the group should be chosen to represent the Sun brought to birth. A young child - preferably male and of age to be somewhat self-guided through a rebirth canal - would be ideal. However, where young ones are absent, a male adult with a bright and playful attitude may fill this role.

To begin, white votive candles from around the central altar should be removed, one for each person to be carried in procession to the ritual space.

* Note: The berries of the mistletoe and holly are poisonous if ingested. Keep this in mind if small children are present.



Except for the lit votives, the ritual space will be approached in total darkness to represent the transition from the dark into the light part of the solar year.

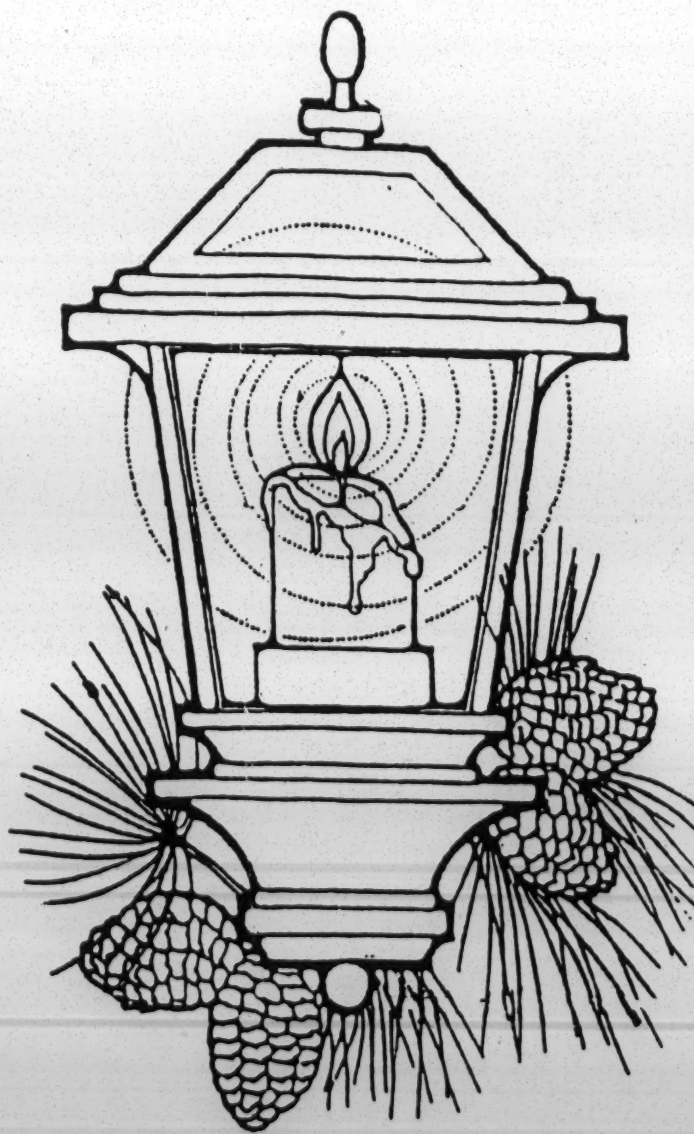
All the lights should be extinguished in the home, and the votive candles to be carried should be lit each from another. As the procession to the ritual space begins, so does the chant "In the beginning there was darkness.. There was darkness and the sea and night." As the ritual area is reached, the group enters the circle and the luminarias are lit with the processional votives. As the luminarias are lit, a second chant begins: "Entering into the longest night. Entering into the Birth of Light." After the luminarias are lit, the votives are snuffed out and replaced in the outer ring around the hearth altar. Everyone then joins hands around the altar and the chant is sung out. She in the role of the priestess, the keeper of the home, welcomes the family gathered to celebrate the rebirth of the Sun and the promise of the coming year.

All gatherers are anointed with the pine oil and censed as they enter the circle. After the luminarias are lit, the circle is then cleansed with air and fire, and earth (salt) and water.

The priestess speaks of the gathering on the longest night of the year, at the time when the Sun makes its passing across our earth in its shortest span all year. Now, though, at this turn of the year — at the Winter Solstice — we take heart that the dark half of the year is left behind us, and we gather in celebration at Yule that all life on our earth will be renewed as the solar year is reborn. At this point, the quarters are summoned and the red quarter

candles are lit, beginning in the East. The element of Spirit is invoked in the center, and the Goddess and God are then invoked and those candles lit.

Everyone gathered then sits or lies around the hearth altar to be guided in spoken meditation. If small children are present of an age not suitable for group meditation, it may be necessary to divide the group and remove the children away for some quiet activity, such as Yule stories, while part of the group in turn participates in the meditation. When everyone has made their journey, the children are welcomed back into the circle for the (re)birth of the Sun King. If so desired, suitable background music may be used for attunement and accompaniment.



To attune, everyone is directed to relax bodies and minds, to breathe deeply together, letting go of all tension, anxiety and unrest. While the group breathing continues, participants are directed to visualize and feel the earth's energy rising up and coursing through their bodies, and the circuit should be continuous as the energy drains down and out as roots sinking down, down to the depths of the cold earth. After this grounding and centering, the journey begins...

You are walking alone in the woods this night, the longest night of the year. The air is cool and crisp, and the light of the rising moon flickers through the bare branches. You feel exhilarated by the joyful expectancy in the air, and feel the connectedness to all those you share the forest with this night. Your path curves down and around, and presently you find yourself in a clearing. In the midst of the clearing is a small woodpile. You are drawn toward it and light a fire to warm yourself and soon the light and warmth of the fire enfold you. As you watch the flames flicker and dance, and the smoke rise into the air, you begin to feel sleepy, very sleepy, and you soon fall into a deep, trance-like sleep.

There is an inky blackness surrounding you. It is becoming colder and colder as you realize you are descending down, into the earth, deep into the heart of the earth. Here on this long, dark night, you are spiralling down and down into a deep abyss. It is so dark that you cannot even see your own hand held before you, yet you know you are safe and have no use for fear.

Then out of this dark blackness you see a tiny ray of light, very small, faintly flickering, almost dying, yet not quite. You begin to fan the light with your hands. You breathe into the light and the flames begin to grow, brighter and brighter, and soon the space around you is filled with a sparkling, shimmering light. You see in the center of that glimmering light a gift. A beautiful gift, one you have created. You have breathed life into this gift. (Pause for a couple of minutes).

And now you carry this gift back up through the darkness, rising back up through the earth and back into your place by the fire. And you know that the longest night is now over, and that you have kept the light burning. You can return to the circle now, bringing your gift to share. And you will return peacefully and gently. When you are ready, open your eyes and return to your family.

At this point, each person may share their experience and share of their gift with one another.

Whereas the guided meditation portion of the ritual is more low-key and intrapersonal, the ritual opens from here with a more festive and playful flavor.

The women in the group line up, standing front to back with legs apart, to form a birth canal for the Sun King to pass. The child (or well-chosen adult), should be robed in gold or bright red or orange.

A woman representing the crone should be at the head of the birth canal, as it is the crone who brings forth new life from the void of all existence. The child may need some guidance or cajoling to pass through the



canal (but shouldn't be forced). In other words, children usually respond quite well when a game is made out of it.

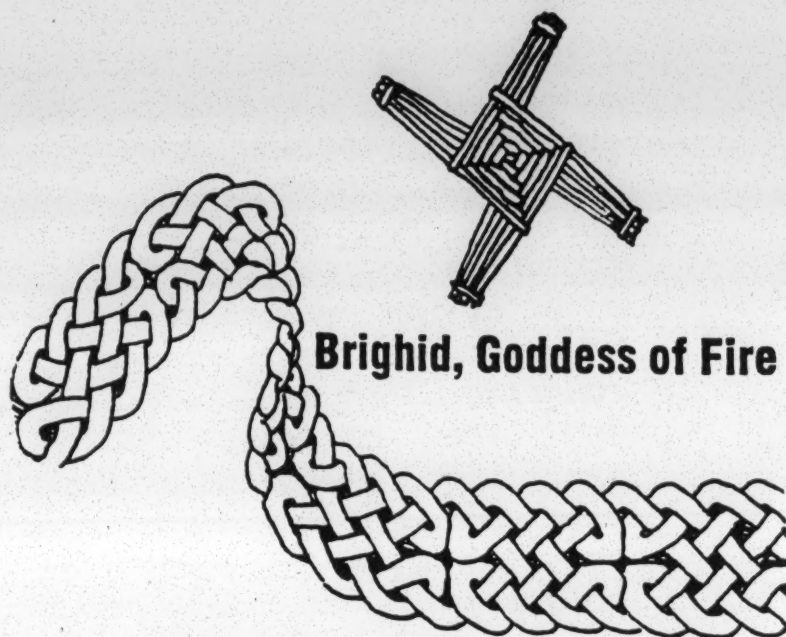
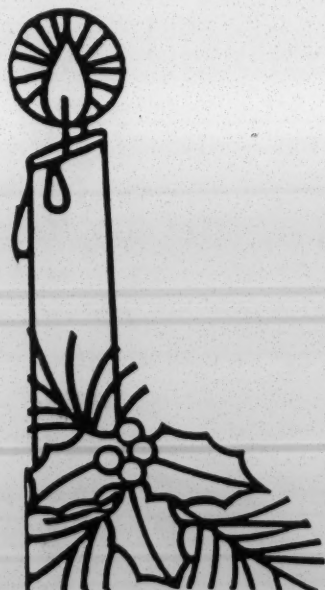
As the Sun King passes through the birth canal, the men chant "Here Comes the Sun King" (à la Beatles) (Hey - not "Here comes the Sun," well, sure, if you want to...), and as he reaches the crone, she speaks: "Out of the darkness present in all things, new Life and Light is born!" The Sun King emerges and is crowned, paraded around the circle amid claps, shouts, kisses, general laughter and merriment. He is blessed as the new life and warmth of the season brought to birth and growth.

Next the food and drink are blessed and the feasting, revelry, music and all around sharing begin.

When appropriate, the circle is taken down as it was constructed, with the exception of the Spirit candle or Yule log representation which is to be tended throughout the Solstice cycle where it is feasible to do so.

Merry ye meet and merry ye part, and merry ye meet all again!

A joyous Yuletide to you all from all of us in Seasons...



Brighid, Goddess of Fire

The Celtic Great Mother Goddess is best personified in the form of Brighid (pronounced Breed), and, although she is the best known and most popular of all the goddesses in the Celtic pantheon, she is actually a composite of many earlier Irish goddesses, i.e. Danu, Macha, the Morrigan, and Tephí. Although most ancient Irish goddesses were tied to specific places (Aine, moon goddess of Munster, Sionan, goddess of the River Shannon), Brighid was a unifying factor of Celtic spiritual thought. So powerful is her sway over the Irish people that, reluctant to give her up under the onslaught of St. Patrick and his monks, she was transformed into St. Brigit and is still much beloved of the Irish, particularly around her shrines and at the monastery at Kildare. (Cill Dara, Church of the Oak).

Brighid is the Goddess of Fire and the Sun, the Hearth and activities related to the hearth like spinning, weaving, smithwork and many forms of healing. She is also the Goddess of Poetry and Music, products of our inner fire. Her festival is Imbolc, which falls on February 1st or February 13th in some parts of the Celtic world. The word Imbolc means "in the belly" as the seeds for the Spring are still in the womb of the Mother Goddess. It has also been translated as "ewe-milk" or "parturition," and the ancients made pilgrimages at Imbolc honoring and celebrating the fluids of the womb, waters sacred to the Old Religion. January was considered a "dead month" and on Imbolc the Goddess breathed life into the dead month of Winter. This was essentially the beginning of Spring in the Celtic world.

Brighid lends her name to many places in Ireland and England as well as other parts of Western



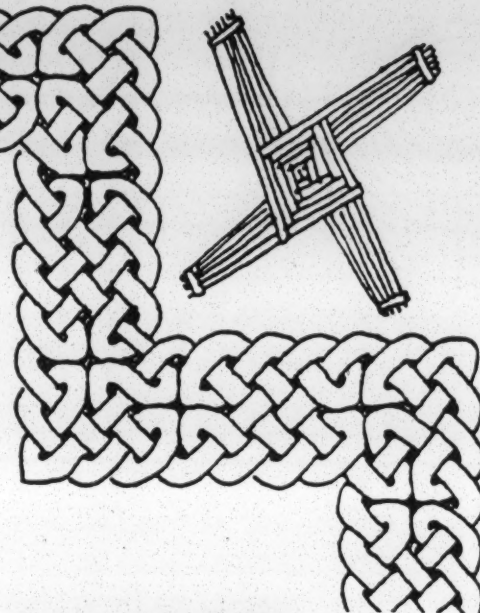
Europe. The rivers Brent, Braint, and Brighid in England, Wales, and Ireland respectively, Bridekirk, Bride Cross, Bridestow, Bridewell, even the word Britain itself. Three of her most common symbols, the vulture, the serpent, and the cow, were also symbols of Isis, the Egyptian goddess. Her sacred imagery was associated with the sun and moon, cows, sheep, vultures, baths, fire and milk. Her festival coincides with the festivals of the Roman goddess Juno.

Brighid, it has been suggested, is not one figure alone but a term suggesting the collective "Goddess." She was certainly triple-aspected as the Goddess was most often depicted. She is mentioned as the mother, the wife, and the daughter of the Dagda, the good God. Her name from "breo-saigit" means fiery arrow.

The best way to get in touch with the Lore of Brighid is to read about St. Brigit in the books of the Lives of the Saints. So much of Irish Goddess lore has been perverted or destroyed by Christian teachings, but in stories of St. Brigit, we can see her spark shining through. She could handle fire without being burnt as only a Fire Goddess could and in the monastery at Kildare a sacred fire burned always. It is said that Brigit the Saint was consecrated as a bishop -- ecclesiastically unlikely but shows that even with a rising patriarchal consciousness, Brigit was still accorded as much power as a man.

The Brighid's Cross, a symbol woven of reed or straw is fashioned in the shape of a swastika or fire cross. This is a solar symbol of protection and is still used throughout Ireland today to protect the harvest and farm animals.

In our home at Imbolc or Bridesmas we weave Brighid's crosses. We also make homemade butter to honor her connections to milk, and we bake Irish Soda Bread, also called Barmbrack.



Homemade Butter

Pour chilled whipping cream into a wide-mouthed jar with a tight lid. Close it up and shake it until it "butters." This will take 20 minutes and lots of patience. Pour off the liquid and rub in a little salt.

Barmbrack

Sift together 4 cups whole wheat flour, 3 tsp. soda, 1 tsp. salt. Mix in 1 cup raisins. Add enough milk or buttermilk to make kneadable dough (about 1 1/2 cups). Knead into a smooth ball. Push raisins in to prevent scorching. Place on a pie plate and flatten to about 3 inches thick. Score the top with a sharp knife to divide the loaf into fourths. (Cut about halfway through). Bake at 375 degrees for 1 hour to 1 hour and 15 minutes until a toothpick comes out clean.



Elisabeth Silverling



Voyage to the Bottom of the Soul

Part 2: The Shaman's Flight



(The following is a continuation of a series that was started in the Samhain issue. As we enter the dark half of the year, we will explore "the journey within.")

Travelling on our shadow journey of the soul, we enter the world of the shaman. The word "shamanism" derives from the Vedic word *sram*, meaning "to heat oneself" or "to practice austerities." The Norse word *seidr* also means "heating" or "boiling." The shaman is one who early in life has experienced a spiritual crisis. Its effects are similar but not related to a nervous breakdown and begin with feelings of dismemberment, contact with the invisible realm through visions and voices and culminate in a higher realization.

This crisis is a very personal and powerful experience and enables the newly-born shaman to discover a deeper intuition of the sacred. The transformation allows the shaman to come back to his group more intellectually and physically powerful and filled with a vital spirit. These gifts from the underworld in turn are used to cure sickness and offer spiritual comfort along with infusing the tribe's mythology with new imagery. The difference between the priest and the shaman is that the priest has been

initiated into society in order to follow rigid ceremonial patterns based on a certain doctrine. The priest is inducted ritually into a structured religious organization and holds a certain rank in a hierarchy. An example of this type of ceremonial construct is practiced by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and other Western Mystery traditions. This rigid, disciplined system is enacted in groups and subjected to hierarchal structures.

The shaman, however, has gained a power completely on his own and does not have it bestowed upon him ritually from above. They are not impressed with 32nd degree magicians. As a consequence of a personal psychological rupture, the familiars and guardians encountered are completely unique to the individual and do not depend on previously developed gods.

Because of this emphasis on subjective experience, the shaman is one who, like the hermit, stands outside the group because the interests and anxieties of the group-mind is of no importance to them. The shamanistic vision and the energies called toward this realization are of greater force than the organized rituals offered by the group. Like the prisoner who is left alone in his

cell, it is the solitude of the shaman that allows them to encounter the power of the Great Spirit and the Great Mystery which the distractions of the group prevent access to.

In order to achieve access to the shamanic mode of reality, the North American Indians set upon their vision quests. Here, a boy at the onset of puberty was left by his father in a lonesome and faraway place where he fasted and prayed until a spiritual visitor came in a dream to give the boy his power. This familiar could confer the power to cure people as a shaman as well as the ability to become a great hunter and warrior. Here the father does not fear for the son but offers him the solitude of an initiation where the youth can go on a journey of emptiness and self-discovery. He is not given an image of what god looks like nor a thick book of cryptic magical symbols but is entirely entrusted to himself alone. What he brings back to the world will be honored and accepted as divinely given.

A Caribou Eskimo shaman named Igjugarjuk gave an account of his ordeal through which he gained his shamanistic powers. He was carried in the depth of winter to a small hut where he sat on a small animal skin carpet. He was given no food or drink and told to concentrate on the Great Spirit. He fasted for a total of thirty days during which time he only had a few drinks of water and a small piece of meat. The strain of fasting in the severe cold made him feel as if he "sometimes died a little." Toward the end, a helping spirit in the shape of a woman came to him while he was

asleep and seemed to hover in the air over him. He never dreamt of her again afterwards, but she became his helping spirit.

Black Elk, who was a leader and shaman of the Sioux tribe had a prophetic vision as a young boy about which he said, "I saw myself on the central mountain of the world, the highest place, and I had a vision because I was seeing in the sacred manner of the world. But the central mountain is everywhere."

The central mountain or center of the world is the *axis mundi* around which all revolves. It is the silent hub of the wheel - the point at which time and eternity come together. This is the same state experienced by the dying person in The Tibetan Book of the Dead "wherein all things are like the void and cloudless sky, and the naked spotless intellect is like unto a transparent vacuum without circumference or centre". A common philosophical description of God or the Eternal is a sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.

Thus Black Elk had the realization that he contained eternity while living as part of the temporal world. Hermann Hesse describes this same experience in his book Siddhartha when he meditates upon a river. He comes to the recognition that, although the individual ripples in the water are constantly changing and disappearing, the entity of the river itself remains constant.

The journey into darkness is a time of terror and awe when one goes forth into the unknown. This feeling of being drawn towards an uncertain path is illustrated quite well in the Tarot Moon card. The mysterious



THE MOON.



pull of the moon is as bewitching as Circe or the Germanic Lorelei and can drive people to destruction and lunacy. The primal crawfish in the depths represents the unchanged unconscious that must take a perilous journey toward the Forbidden City.

The watchdog guardians of the underworld that seem to be so fearful can actually become our helpers as we continue on the way. They are telling us that the traveller's animal nature must be integrated into the psyche rather than feared like the wolf in the northern woods. It is often the thing that we fear the most that becomes the best experience for us. That which seems the most difficult and alien can become what we trust and find the most faithful. We need the energy of the beasts to help guide and protect us on the way. The tiger can become the lady...

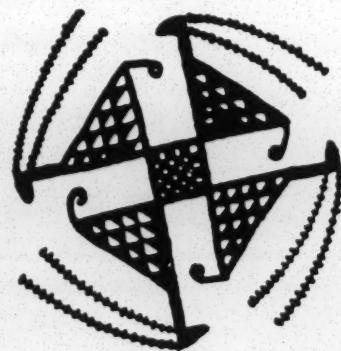
One of the means of setting off on the path is through the use of shamanic drumming and dancing to attain a trance-like state. Other methods include rhythmic chanting, prayer and meditation and rituals that enact attunement to the elements of nature. In doing so, the shaman is able to establish a consciousness that allows them to communicate with the animal as well as the plant kingdom. The shaman can conjure up familiars - the animals and birds that have given them power and assist in the flight to the upper regions.

The shaman is often depicted as a bird, whether it be on an Egyptian tomb where the soul flies like a bird from the dead body to the German legend of Lohengrin, the swan knight. Zeus

disguises himself as a swan and makes love to the beautiful Leda in Greek mythology. It is a dove that brought the annunciation to Mary.

In the paleolithic caverns of Lascaux, there is a picture interpreted to be a shaman dressed in bird costume who has magically disemboweled a bull. The shaman is lying prostrate in a trance and has the figure of a bird perched on his shaman staff beside him. In many traditions birds are spiritual messengers just like angels who are just anthropomorphized birds.

In an Apache myth, the world creator, Black Hactcin, mixed a drop of rain with earth and made a ball of mud. He fashioned a bird from the mud and whirled it around clockwise, causing the bird to get dizzy and see many images flying around. From these dream images manifested all the birds on the planet. These clockwise whirling birds became swastika designs as depicted on prehistoric Indian shell designs and are also used in the symbolism of the Indians of the Pueblo, Navaho and Apache tribes. Swastikas that are thrown counter-clockwise, however, appear on many Chinese images of the Buddha. Here, he is trying to remove his consciousness from dreamlike forms in order to return to the abyss of the Void. If two Sowulo runes, whose traditional meaning is the sun, are joined together, they also form a swastika or Sun-wheel. These Sun-wheels are still rolled down hillsides in Germany at the solstices in the form of burning wagon cart wheels. When they spin sunwise or clockwise, they are used to draw power in and return it to



Top of page - Shell designs from Spiro Mound, Oklahoma.
Side of page - Pottery ware from Samarra.

Sowulo rune

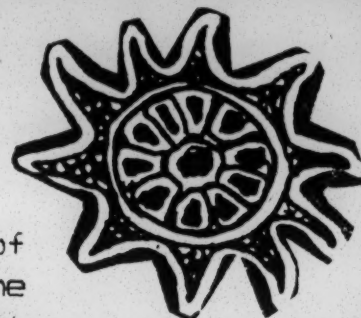


the Sun so that it may continue on its course. If the swastika spins widdershins or counter-clockwise, it is used to expel or banish power.

Another method the shaman uses to reach altered states of consciousness is by exploring what the hallucinogenic plants have to teach. These substances are able to alter the chemical composition of the brain by temporarily inactivating the normal screening programs, thus leading to an expanded state of awareness. Anyone who has ever taken psychoactive substances knows that the world is seen without preconceptions or judgments, as if one is seeing it in a whole new way for the first time. The senses become more amplified and feelings become more intense, therefore making the "set and setting" for the trip important.

The ritual use of mind-altering substances to gain insight into deeper realms has been practiced by all cultures. Aztec priests used morning glory seeds. Mexican curanderos (healers) use the psilocybin mushroom, cannabis is used by some sects of Hindu Tantrism, an LSD-like, ergot-derived beverage was used in Greece as a sacrament at Eleusis (the Eleusian Fields), witches made flying ointments with belladonna, henbane and datura; Shiva, the Cosmic Lord of the Dance in the Hindu tradition wears a datura plant on his headdress and Siberian shamans drank the urine of men who had eaten the fly agaric or *Amanita Muscaria* mushroom.

The tradition of fly agaric as sacred plant may have begun in ancient India where one book of the Rig Veda is entirely devoted



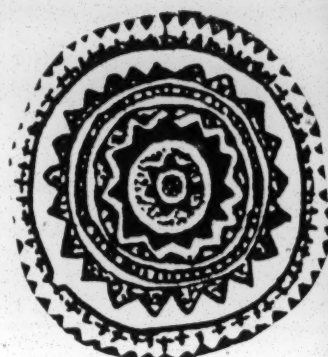
to the blessings and worship of *Soma*. There is a passage in the 74th hymn of the Rig Veda that talks about the drinking of urine and has led to the interpretation that *Soma* and fly agaric may have been the same thing.

The ingestion of fly agaric was limited at first to the Brahmins (holy men) of the Aryans, a people who came down from the north from the Caucasus Mountains and spoke an Indo-European language. As these Aryan invaders spread across the continent, the practice may have been transferred to the Siberian shamans. They held birch trees in special reverence because fly agaric grows in symbiotic relationship with the birch tree. This tradition may have then been passed over to the Nordic tribes since the tree that Odin hangs on in his shamanistic knowledge-gaining ordeal is thought by some to be a birch tree.

Many German fairy tale books abound with pictures of the beautiful red and white-dotted mushroom known as *Fliegenpilz* (flying mushroom). There is even a fresco dating from 1291 in a church in France that shows Adam and Eve with the Tree of Life. The tree is depicted as a large branched *Amanita muscaria* with a serpent wrapped around it!

The use of these hallucinogens was primarily within a ritual context, in which there was a clearly defined direction as to what knowledge was to be gained. The mind set and ambiance of the ritual was also carefully planned and would only take place during auspicious occasions of the year.

Unfortunately, in our western materialistic culture, the use of psychoactive drugs has



Above - Rock art images from tribes in California believed to have been inspired by datura visions.



"Like a stag come here to drink! Drink soma as much as you like. Pissing it out day by day, O generous one, You have assumed your most mighty force."

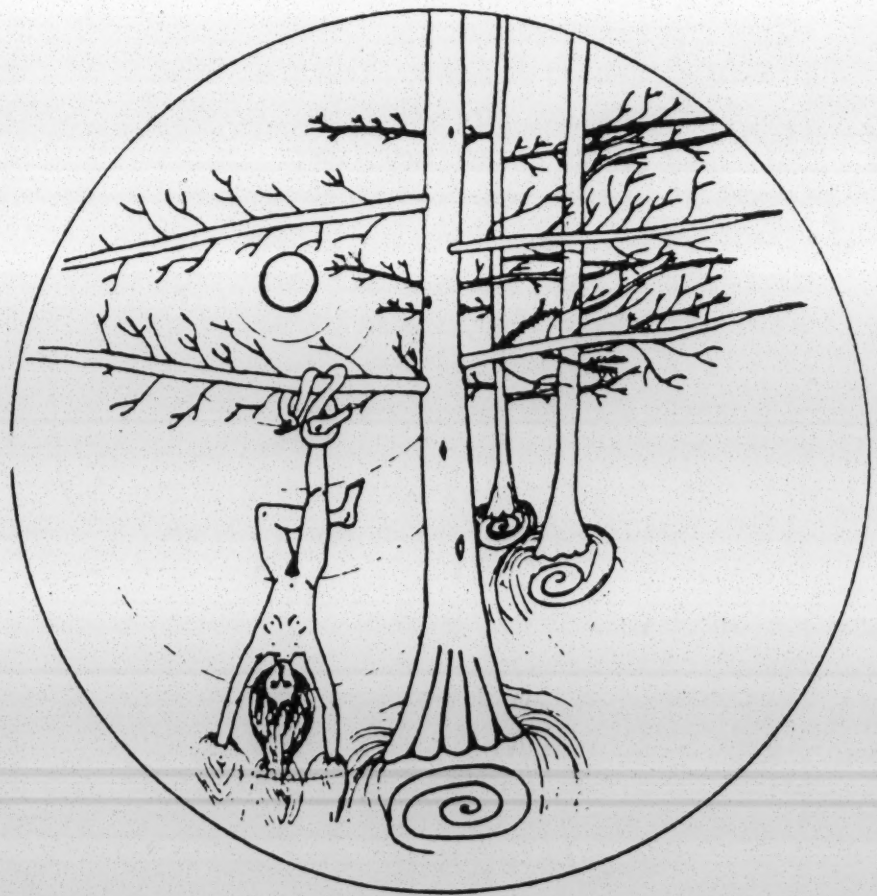
VIII 4.10 Rig Veda

devolved from the sacramental to the recreational. Some drugs that have fallen into this category are tobacco, which was regarded as a sacred power plant by North American Indians. When Sir Walter Raleigh introduced smoking to Europe, it took on a recreational meaning and poses a major health problem today. The coca plant is chewed by the Andean Indians to help them to maintain energy in the thin mountain air. Today it has been processed into the more potent cocaine and has become one of the major causes of misery and murder in society. Coffee was first used by Islamic Sufis who valued its stimulant properties for long nights of meditation. It then became a recreational drink in European society in the 17th century. Today it is used to combat fatigue caused by having to adhere to time clocks that do not always follow our natural biorhythms. The sacramental use of wine in Catholic rituals is different from that of the person drinking Thunderbird.

All of these drugs are examples of plants that have become desacralized, therefore creating problems with addiction and leading to criminalization. This has caused the ritual use of peyote by the Native American Church to be unfairly considered illegal in the eyes of the Supreme Court. Society has forgotten about the sacred use of hallucinogenic plants. Neither the efforts of people like Aldous Huxley who wrote the Doors of Perception (from which the Doors got their name) and Timothy Leary who tried to advocate a respectful attitude toward these substances could stop the profanation from happening.

"Timothy Leary's dead. long live the outside, looking in..."

A common image that illustrates the shamanic metamorphosis is that of the Hanged One on the tree. It is here that the person who is undergoing the transformation suffers and dies in order to be reborn. The shaman's journey is like the endless round of the serpent biting its tail, casting off its old skin to come forth renewed again. In the willingness to be torn apart, overcome death and be restored, the shaman demonstrates that there is something eternal within that is stronger than death. Here once again we have the concept of realizing permanence beneath the phenomenon of change as previously shown in the flow of the river and the still point in the central mountain.



The Hanged One from the Motherpeace Tarot deck.

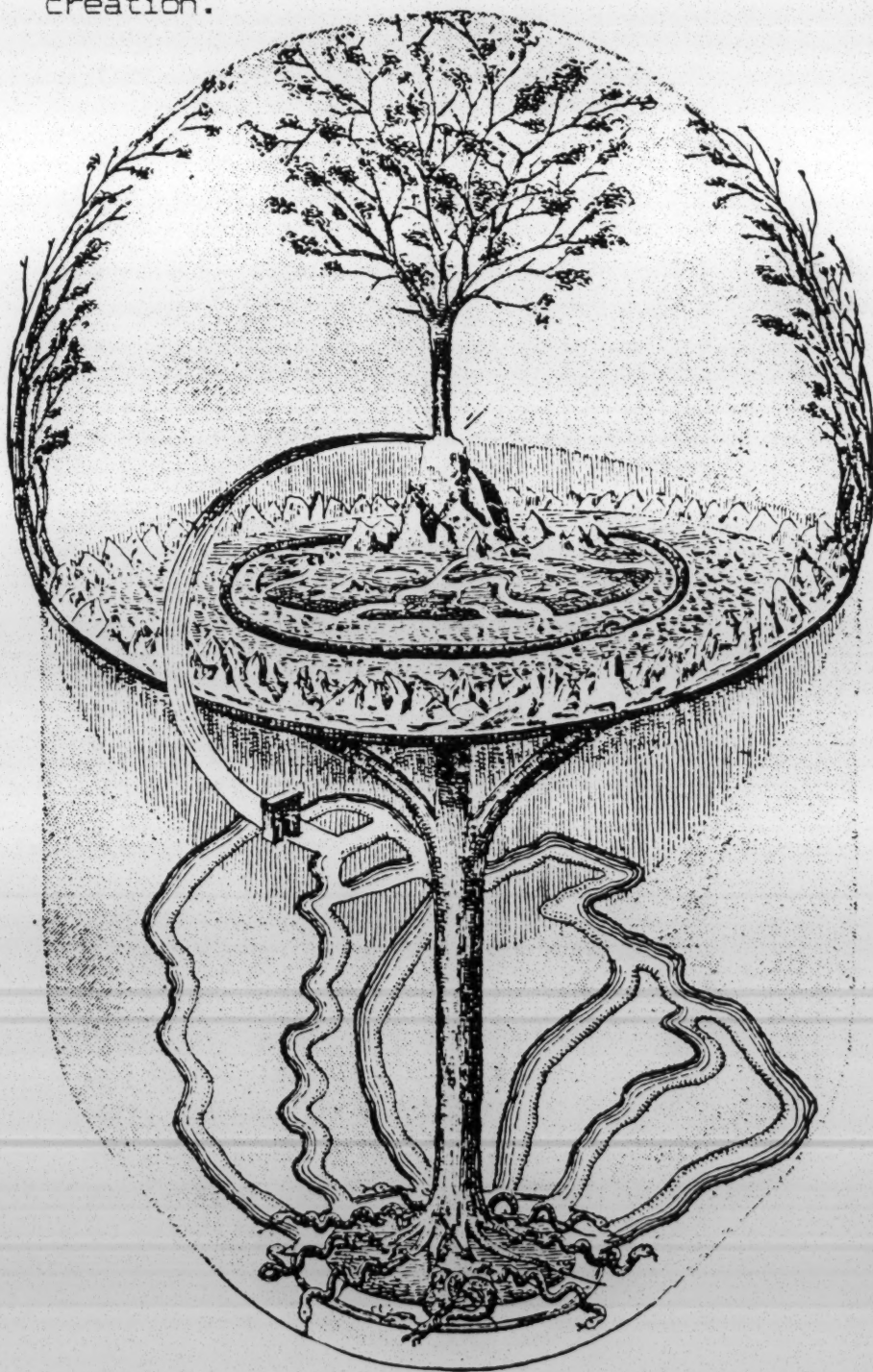
The Hindus and Buddhists consider the transformation that the yogi achieves as taking on the "diamond" body. This means that the yogi must undergo the same stresses of heat and pressure that the basest coal undergoes in order to become a pure diamond. The same process is involved in the formation of metamorphic (to change body) rock as simple sandstone becomes beautiful marble. This change from a lower to higher body is also known as The Great Work and is an underlying principle of alchemy. It is achieved by surrendering the temporal ego, that we often cling to and easily bruise, to the eternal Higher Self.

The process that shamanism celebrates involves the voluntary surrender of oneself to death and resurrection. In order to undergo this process of death and initiation, paleolithic cavedwellers crawled through narrow birth-canal tunnels to the deepest part of caves where they experienced magical beasts on the wall. Native Americans descended into kivas, Egyptian priests were interred in sarcophagi, Indian yogis were buried alive. Neolithic people entered underground stone chambers and prehistoric Indians in Ohio journeyed through underground serpent mounds.

The image of the shaman as the Hanged One has been seen in many cultures. "Artemis, the Hanged One," had a sanctuary in ancient Greece where the cypress that is sacred to her represents resurrection. This tree is also predominant in today's cemeteries for these same forgotten reasons. In the Nordic myths, Odin is the hanged one as he hangs on the

Yggdrasil (Tree of Life) for nine days and nights and learns the secrets of the runes. This is also the journey that Jesus undertook when he was nailed to the cross, entered into the tomb and was resurrected three days later. The Buddha sat underneath the Bo tree for three days and achieved enlightenment.

A modern version of this myth is the man that was put into the sensory deprivation tank in the movie "Altered States" and devolves into simian and protoplasmic forms. He transforms himself too as he journeys back in time, lets go of his individual human form and becomes as one with the whole of creation.



Yggdrasil, The World Tree of the Edda
18th century engraving

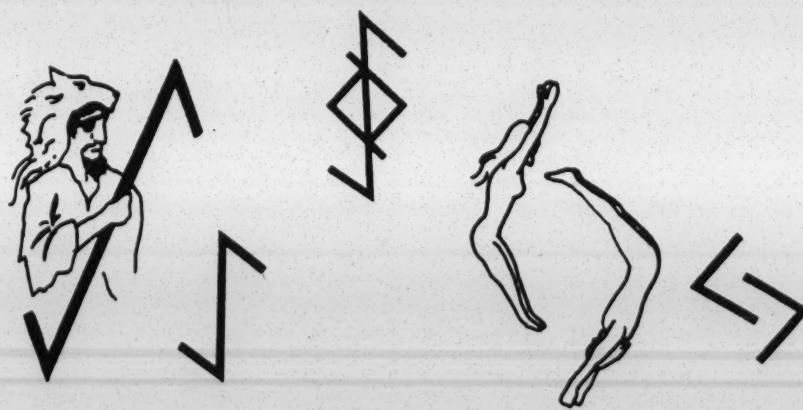
In the Norse tradition, the tree that Odin hangs on is called the Yggdrasil, which means "horse of Odin". The Scaldic names for Odin include "Lord of the Gallows" and the "Hanging God". In Old Norse, Yggdrasil also means "gallows", referring to the symbolic death that takes place there and also to the custom of hanging enemies as a sacrifice to Odin. The Yggdrasil tree is known as the World Ash Tree but is sometimes interpreted to be a yew tree, a symbol of death, as well as a birch tree, a symbol of birth. The yew is an evergreen tree that is associated with death because it contains a deadly poison that was used to bring about a merciful death in cases of terminal illness. The Norse god, Uller, who hunts with bows made of the yew, kills Odin at the autumn equinox and reigns throughout the winter. At the spring equinox, Odin comes back to slay Uller and rules through the summer. This myth corresponds to the Oak and the Holly King who reign over the dark and light halves of the year in the Celtic tradition.

The birch tree on the other hand represented birth and fertility. A whip of birch twigs was used in old Dutch May Day celebrations to make women fertile. The Lapps considered the birch tree to be the "tree of life". In some areas of Holland, birch twigs are tied to the door of newlyweds for fertility.

The connection of the Yggdrasil to the yew and birch trees means that it is like a cosmic spine that straddles both life and death, reaching down to its earthy roots and up to the glorious sky. When Odin hangs on the Yggdrasil tree, he is

suspended between the two barriers of life and death and transcends them both. This sacrificial act gave him the ability to travel between both realms, to become the "wild hunter" or "warrior" as don Juan says, "Break on through to the other side..."

The cross, tree or gallows that the shaman is hanged on represents the *axis mundi*, where time and eternity come together. A beautiful pictorial description of Odin hanging on the Yggdrasil tree is the Jera rune spinning around the Eihwaz rune. The Eihwaz rune represents Yggdrasil and resembles a human spine or backbone. Its traditional meaning is the yew and represents the stillpoint around which everything else revolves. The Jera rune represents change from darkness to light, from spirit into matter and back again. When the two runes are combined they represent time coming together with eternity, change joining with permanence and the Void becoming form. Together, they form an abstract image of what is really meant by Odin on the Yggdrasil and Jesus on the cross. Jesus, Buddha and Odin were all shamans.



The Eihwaz rune (left) and the Jera rune (right) combine to make a symbol of Odin on the Yggdrasil Tree.

The shamans of the paleolithic hunter-gatherer age were replaced by the neolithic priests of agriculture. The agricultural lifestyle was replaced by the Industrial Age which is now being replaced by the Information Age. Since the old hierarchal agricultural-age god of the desert is becoming more irrelevant to the modern day, more people are turning away from established dogma and looking inward. They are becoming interested once again in the Eastern religions and shamanism which allow them to do so. When Nietzsche said "God is dead," he meant the old patriarchal god whose world no longer reflected the Industrial Age he was living in. Now, at the dawning of the New Aeon, the chains of the priests of Yahweh are dissolving by themselves. For as the shaman knows, the people will perish if they have no vision....

Karin Clark



A Letter from Iceland

Greetings!

It was a pleasure to hear from you and to read the 1st Anniversary issue. Yes - the old religion and beliefs are alive and well in Iceland. The Lutheran church is the state church but nobody goes there - we are pagans. The gods Odin and Thor are still alive and well.

The head of the heathen sect is a man called Sveinbjorn Beinteinsson. He is a farmer, poet and a High Priest. I'm sure you would enjoy meeting him.

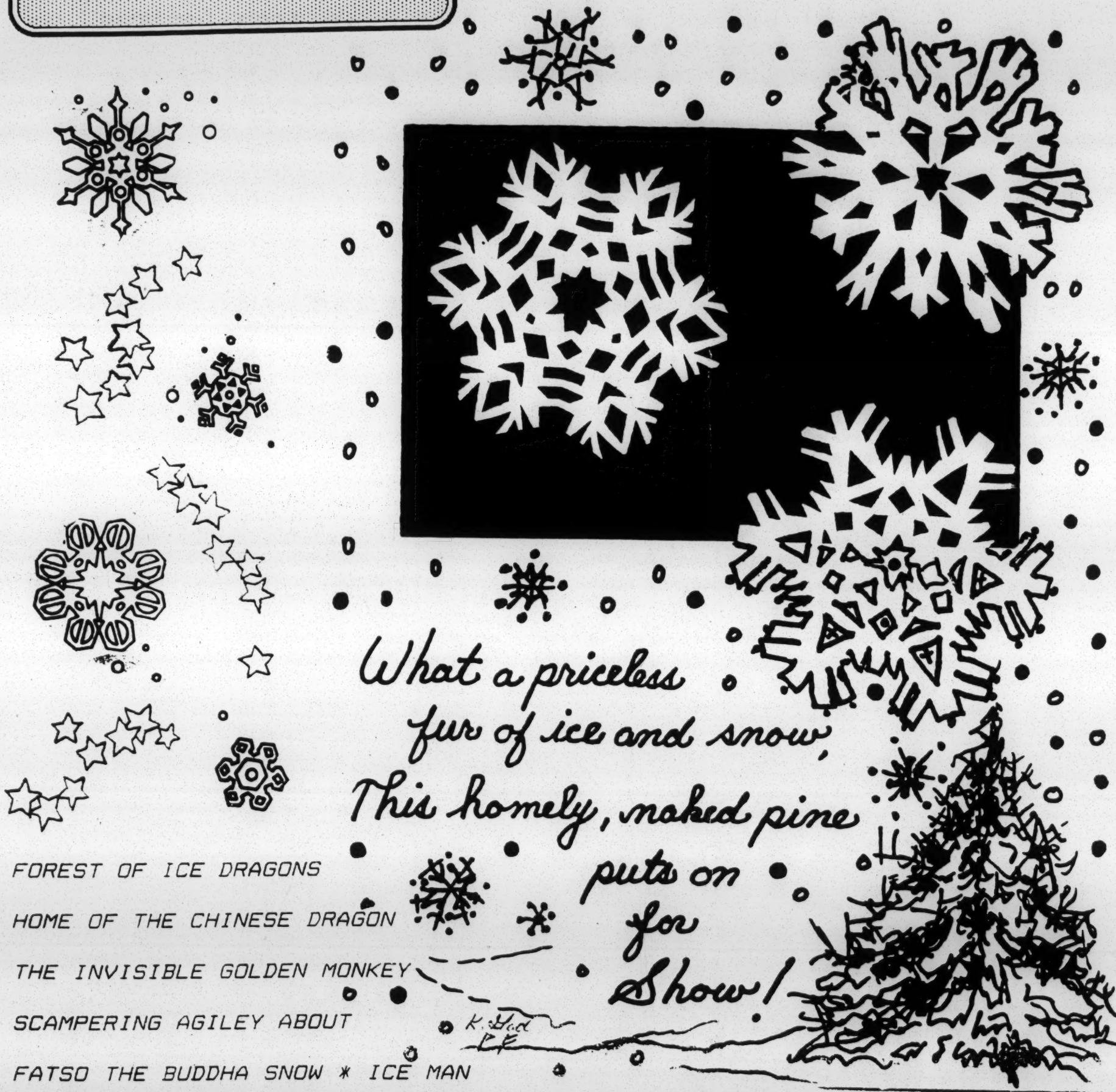
Many believe Iceland is blessed and is one of the seven chakra centers of the Earth - particularly at a place called Snaefellsjokku - where once a year all of us scribes, musicians, witches, warriors, fairies, yogis, and shamans from all over the island and from different parts of the world gather to plug into the wellspring of natural power under the eyes of the glacier.

There is a book on "Galdur" or Icelandic Magic: A Book of Grimoire by a certain Solomon from Texas University. It's in English and includes an excellent history of Icelandic magical beliefs and yes... spells and magical symbols. Also important: Arfleid Island (In Iceland) by Adam Rutheford; available at Stotstone (?) Books, 29 Station Road, Portsmouth, Kent.

I am writing this information off the phone and am suddenly in a whirlwind rush... I will be in Iceland for awhile - reorganizing and practicing the alchemy of word and sound. Will be in touch.

Michael Dean Pollock
Reykjavik, Iceland

The Muse's Corner



*What a priceless
fur of ice and snow,
This homely, naked pine
puts on
for
Show!*

FOREST OF ICE DRAGONS

HOME OF THE CHINESE DRAGON

THE INVISIBLE GOLDEN MONKEY

SCAMPERING AGILEY ABOUT

FATSO THE BUDDHA SNOW * ICE MAN

THE BIGGEST GLISTENING ICE CUBE I EVER SAW, THE ICY DRAGON.

LACE GRACES THE DRAGON'S BACK OF NEON LIGHTS.

I PHOTO THE FOREST OF ICE AND DRAGONS BEFORE HE ESCAPES

UNDER THE SHINING SUN -

THE REGAL, ROYAL DRAGON SITS GLISTENING - SUN - MELTING,

GLISTENING DRAGON -

QUICK, JACKIE, TAKE HIS PICTURE BEFORE HE ESCAPES.

Ice Child

Oh dormant child of ice and snow.
The world may think your heart is cold
And love can never grow;
But underneath the Arctic Ice
The fire of the Midnight Sun doth glow.
It melts the ice, it sends the flow,
Fire and Ice are ONE
you know.

Invocation and Brew to Welcome the Winter Solstice

Rest now Mother Earth,
the Snow Queen cometh.
Rest now under her coat of virgin purity.
Rest in peace and stillness,
Mother Earth,
the Snow queen comes to innoculate
the roots of the Yggdrasil with
the antiseptic elixir.

Hail Queen of Ice and Snow!
You are the Mother of Spring.

3 T. dried crushed catnip
1 T. dried crushed rosemary:
Pour 3/4 cup boiling water over herbs,
steep until brew is medium dark.
Strain. Add to brew 1 T. Ginger Brandy
and 1 T. Dry Gin. Reheat, but do not boil.
Float on top but do not eat with the
elixir, 3 allspice berries.

Text and artwork by Kathleen Gad



Father Tree

The little leaves come whirling down
In shades of gold and red;
Tumbling to the damp, cold Earth
to find their Winter bed.

"Go to sleep" says Father Tree
for Summer is gone away;
Autumn soon will leave us
and on the Earth you'll stay;
Under a blanket of crisp white snow
warm and snug you'll be.

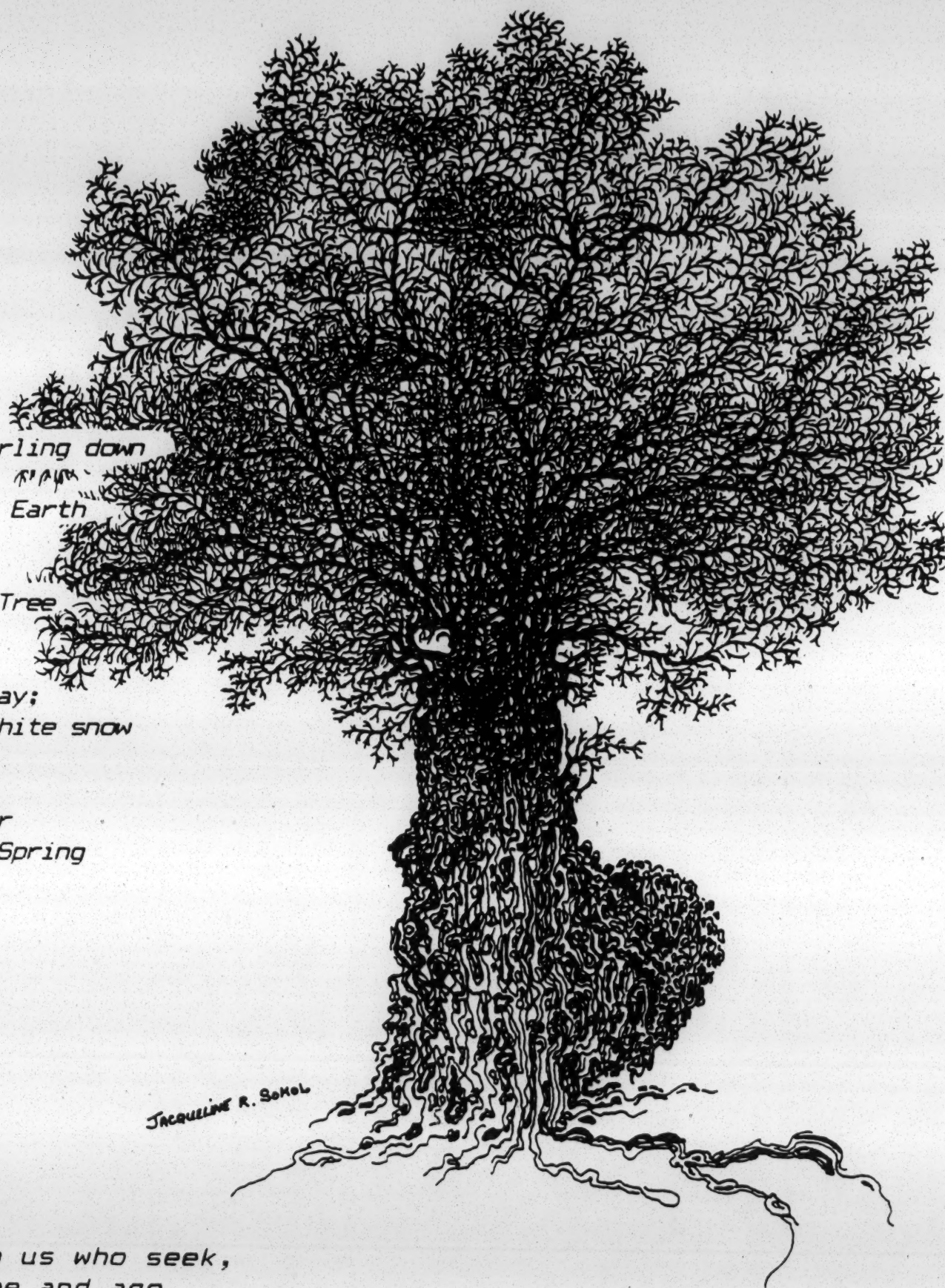
Sleeping through the Winter
Till the flowers of Spring
You see.

Kathleen Gad

Hermit

He beckons mentally to us who seek,
the hermit lost in time and age.
Heavy browns, linen coarse
cover his aged form.
He does not bend from the weight
of long hours spent with books
laden with words of light.
His path worn smooth
from many a trip to share with us.
The peace of mind and the dreams -
of memories past and lessons learnt.

Kathleen Binger



As the Wheel Turns
Astro Advice from
Emery Pendragon...



Horoscopes for December
21st, 1990 through
March 21st, 1991

Aries (March 21 - April 20) ♈

December - The last week of December is going to be very intense. Conflicts will occur on the job and in the home.

January - Conflicts will continue to fuel the martian temperament. Get the facts; rumors will cause upsets which may lead to losing face with superiors and associates. A decision might have to be made, a close friend will provide needed information. Mercury goes direct on the fourth.

February - The pieces of the puzzle start fitting. Think of the future.

March - Start your spring cleaning by taking care of old problems. Your birthday starts a new cycle. Leave the excess karma behind you.

Taurus - (April 21 - May 20) ♉

December - Financial picture changes, and a change of residence may occur.

January - Arrogance may rear its ugly head, don't let it spoil an accomplishment. A great deal of stress will be experienced later in the month concerning the possibility of financial loss. Avoid speculations.

February - Frugal is the key word for this month. Continue to avoid speculations. Loans come due but don't count on your partner's resources. Don't pay attention to gossip, it will only lead to scandal and affect your health.

March - This month could turn out to be better than originally thought. Alliances may prove beneficial. Watch your generosity.

Gemini (May 21 - June 20) ♊

December - Keep your social calendar open. Wasting resources could delay long-term goals.

January - Mercury goes direct, affecting communications and travel connections. Geminis learn something about themselves through their creativity. Pay attention to details. There will be an opportunity to speculate later in the month.

February - Your wish may come true, so be careful what you wish for. Be aware of illusion and avoid chemicals.

March - You may learn a secret that just might upset you. Avoid irrational thinking and trust your instincts.

Cancer (June 21 - July 20) ♋

December - Business decisions will be hard to make. There will be possible upsets and slander.

January - Cancers become lethargic around the house. Someone in your past lends a helping hand.

February - Psychic energy is high; a revelation will take place. Health problems may arise later in the month.

March - Deep feelings are going to be aroused. Follow your instinct.

Leo (July 21 - August 20) ♌

December - Lady luck has turned her back on you. Avoid speculations.

January - A well-balanced decision is necessary now. A relationship may change.

February - Friendships and love affairs may be challenged. Your feelings will change suddenly and forcefully, resulting in a hasty decision.

March - Be practical and plan wisely this month. Avoid risks and make sure you're thorough.

Virgo (August 21-September 20) ♍

December - A possible career opportunity may present itself, so be prepared.

January - Present yourself in a professional manner and know what you're talking about. Look the part of who you are trying to play.

February - You may develop a secret enemy. be on your guard.

March - Leave your past behind and look to the future.

Libra (September 21 - October 20) ♎

December - If traveling is in your plans, have your vehicle checked over and double-check reservations.

January - Use diplomacy on the job. Keep feelings in check. Someone you know will try to discredit you.

February - Exercise to ward off stress but do it responsibly.

March - You may spend more than you want this month, make sure you get your money's worth. Be careful of sales pitches.

Scorpio (October 21 - November 20) ♏

December - A position of responsibility will be presented to you. Don't look for instant reward. You will get what you deserve later.

January - Raises will be delayed. make the best of it. don't take any chances.

February - A difference in philosophy will cause a relationship to end. Health problems may occur, so watch your diet.

March - Avoid secrets and gossip, look for solutions to problems. An alliance will form.

Sagittarius (November 21 - December 20) ♐

December - Don't gamble until Jupiter goes direct. Try and be optimistic about your love life. Keep notes on anything important as concentration will be difficult.

January - Friendships may turn into love affairs. Avoid confrontations with authorities.

February - A great deal of social activity and the possibility of a long distance reunion this month. Communication may cause envy. Scandal may be exposed.

March - New moon is a time for reflection. Look in the past for future lessons that need to be learned.

Capricorn (December 21 - January 20) ♑

December - Capricorns should investigate before taking any action to defend yourself.

January - If you're looking for a raise or promotion, it should occur around the middle of the month. Don't let nervous energy get the best of you.

February - Take time to settle financial affairs properly. You may profit even more than originally thought.

March - Be prepared for financial conflicts.

Aquarius (January 21 - February 20) ♒

December - It may not be a good time now to travel. Communication problems may occur; a written correspondence may be delayed or lost.

January - You may be able to express a certain amount of freedom due to a rebellious nature. There is a possibility of a windfall.

February - A hunch pays off, and plans come together. Your wish comes true. Watch resources toward the end of the month. Take care of minor ailments before they turn into major ones.

March - Money comes between you and your mate. Creative ideas are hard to develop, so take your time.

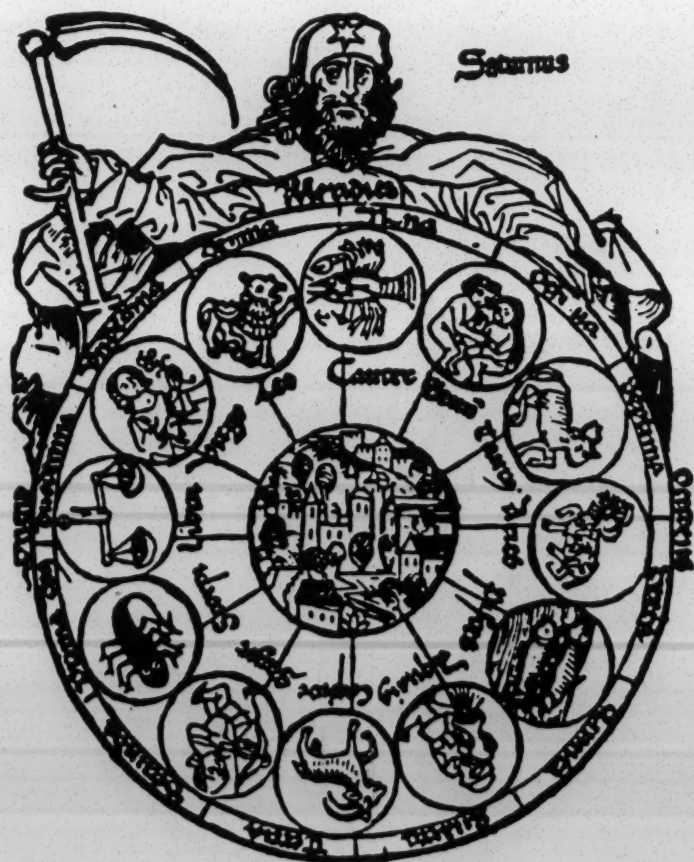
Pisces (February 21 - March 20) ♓

December - Do your major planning toward the middle of January.

January - Set future plans on the new moon. Greediness may get you into legal problems. Don't count on your lucky stars.

February - Delay in money matters may lead to depression. Guard against respiratory infections.

March - Instead of changing scenery, make inner changes and things might look brighter.



Announcement and Barter Page

An Alternative to War with Iraq...

Is it smart to rely on fossil fuels when we know how to draw power directly from sunlight? Examine the cost of oil spills, atmospheric pollution, and wars over who owns what. Think of the lives lost, the birds fouled, the fish beds destroyed, the beaches stained, the smog, the economic slavery which binds us to multi-national corporations, energy monopolies, and the dinosaur way. Tell me, who do you think is smarter, the oil addicted or the solar energy independent? It is time to choose.

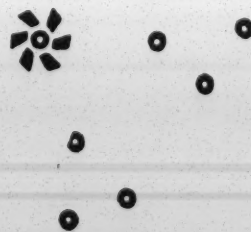
POVERTY AND ENERGY

Poor people are everywhere except in rich neighborhoods. How many people are just barely getting by? Are the vast majority of people owners, renters, or squatters? Think about the problems worldwide. Are we fighting over limited resources or are we working hand-in-heart to find better ways to multiply and share the wealth. The roots of poverty lie in territorial claims. The American ideal is to "own your own piece". What happens when the dream doesn't work for everyone? How bad does it have to get before we learn that it works better to share than to squander? Consider the coordinated workings of any successful organism. While retaining their differences, each organ also links into a greater whole, for mutual aid and support. Material wealth is nothing more than potential energy. This energy can be wielded for good or for ill. Greed does everyone harm. There should be shame when one is rich and another is starving. Lip service is not enough to cure the ills. A socially conscious community, when treating each person as an equal individual, recognizing, culturing, and promoting their particular natural talent (regardless of race, age, gender, national origin, etc.), will not only survive, it will prosper. It is an illusion that poor people are lazy. They just aren't wealthy enough to hire someone else to do it for them. Yet, when the rich become too rich, the serfs will revolt. There is much talk about this on the grapevine. The rumblings are reaching crisis levels.

STARLIGHT

If you're looking for a good source of photovoltaic panels, charge controllers, inverters, home power kits, composting privies, low flush toilets, demand water heaters, wind machines, and other alternative technologies, you will enjoy the latest catalog from Starlight Technology. Just send \$2 for the catalog and a copy of Photovoltaic Basics to:

STARLIGHT TECHNOLOGY
c/o P.O. Box 1328
Bloomington
Indiana
47402



**your
energy
FUTURE!**

Announcing a New Barter Exchange Network

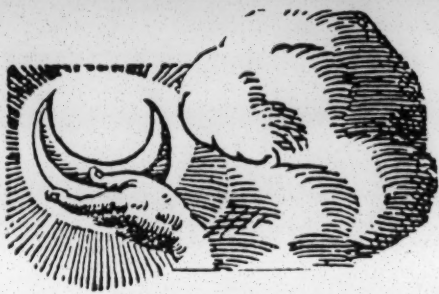
The *Serpent's Tail* would like to announce a new Barter Exchange Network section. It is an alternative to an "advertising" page in that we would like to receive announcements from members of the community offering goods and services that they would like to trade or barter with other network members. The trade or barter agreement would be left to the discretion of the parties involved as to whether they would want to exchange money or goods and services.

We prefer hand-crafted or home business items and products that are ecologically safe and conscious. Our attempt here is to be a proponent of alternatives to the mainstream and to enable more dependence on each other rather than on the dictates of an enormous corporate monoeconoculture. We reserve our right as the editorial board to accept or reject material within this broad framework. If you feel that you have goods & services that you can offer to the exchange network, please contact us.

Announcements are free in exchange for a membership (\$10) which also entitles you to four seasonal issues. We prefer announcements that are copy-ready and written in standard business-card size. It is also possible for us to do the typesetting for you.

Power to the People!

We would like to acknowledge Kathleen Gad's wonderful pumpkin recipes for which we forgot to give her credit for in the previous Samhain issue. The pumpkin fudge was especially delicious!



Free Horoscope!

with a one-year paid subscription to The Serpent's Tail. Includes natal and progressed chart by our own astrologer, Emery Pendragon. Please fill out the membership form on the inside back cover and we will contact you. A \$30.00 value for only \$10.00!

Notes from Tavichonora is the official newsletter of Goddess Chapter, an informal network of Neopagans whose familial roots stretch back to the Colonial Era in the New World. It focuses primarily on the various aspects of personal, familial, cultural, and religious heritage. Notes from Tavichonora is published quarterly, Goddess willing, near Beltane, Lamas, Samhain, and Imbolc. It is sent free of charge to all Goddess Chapter members and to various other Neopagans known to qualify for membership. Neopagans who are not Goddess Chapter members are welcome to subscribe at the non-member rate of \$5/4 issues. We also exchange with other Neopagan publications. We welcome with open arms the submission of articles within the general area of heritage, on genealogy, or on any other topic that may be of interest to the Neopagan community. The deadlines are one month prior to the scheduled publication dates. Beket is the publisher, editor, and general factotum.

c/o Beket • PO Box 8212 • Madison, WI 53708



Editorial Policy

We encourage our readers to make any contributions to the journal such as articles, poetry, art work, etc. Please see our more detailed call for contributors in the back. Our next issue will be out on the Spring Equinox, March 21, 1991. The deadline for submissions is March 1, 1991. We will send you a release form allowing us to print your article and to make any grammatical corrections. Please send any copies of your submission to: The Serpent's Tail, P.O. Box 07437, Milwaukee, WI 53207.

Slavic Paganism — Greek Paganism
Celtic Paganism — Norse Paganism
Baltic Paganism — Vedic Paganism

Only one Neopagan tradition includes them all.

A.D.F. is a Pan-Indo-European reconstructionist tradition of Neopagan Druidism, with an emphasis on excellence. For details, send a #10 SASE (45¢) to: A.D.F. Info, Box 9420-X3, Newark, DE, USA 19714.

Ar nDraíocht Féin: A Druid Fellowship, Inc.

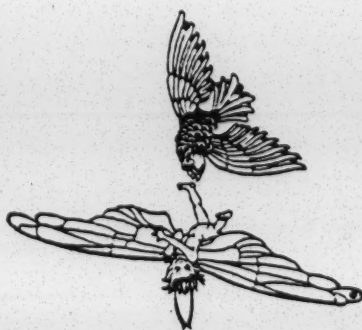
Sprout a warm greeting in Spring!

Order our "Leda and the Swan"
(with eggs and babies)
Spring Greeting Cards

These hand-drawn designs come in various colors. They sell for \$2.00 or can be bartered for something of equal value. Please contact The Serpent's Tail and let us know how many you would like and terms of payment.

As the Light
of Dawn
rises again,
May you stir
with the Earth
upon Her awakening

Welcome the Spring!



The Spring Equinox, March 21st, marks the point at which the days begin to get longer than the nights and the Earth prepares for renewal. This festival is sacred to Ostara, the Germanic Goddess of the Dawn, a time fertility symbol includes the egg, the hanks and the rabbit. It is a time of blessing the seeds and fields, of resurrection and of rebirth.

Cover picture: Leda and Swan, Penwash no. 1480
1 - set of the four Greeting Cards





THE SERPENT'S TAIL



A CALL TO ALL

Shamans, Magicians, Amazons, Networkers, Rainbow Warriors, Fairies, Cooperators, Satyrs, Nymphs, Tribespeople, Forestfolk, Wizards, Elves, Witches, Gypsies, Ecnauts, Pythonesses, Recyclers, Grokers, Consciousness Explorers and Treehuggers..

PLEASE SUBMIT

*articles, poems, essays, invocations, rituals, recipes,
chants, songs, artwork, letters to the editor, announcements, etc.*

ON THESE TOPICS

Astrology, Herbalism, Magick, Wicca, Shamanism, Comparative Mythologies, Buddhism, Goddess Worship, Native American, Egyptian Mysteries, Environmental Issues, Tarot, I Ching, Runes, Seasonal Subjects and other New Aeon-Related topics to:

The Serpent's Tail, P.O. Box 07437, Milwaukee, WI 53207



*Make your Contributions in Creating
the New Myths for the
New Aeon!*



A CALL TO ALL

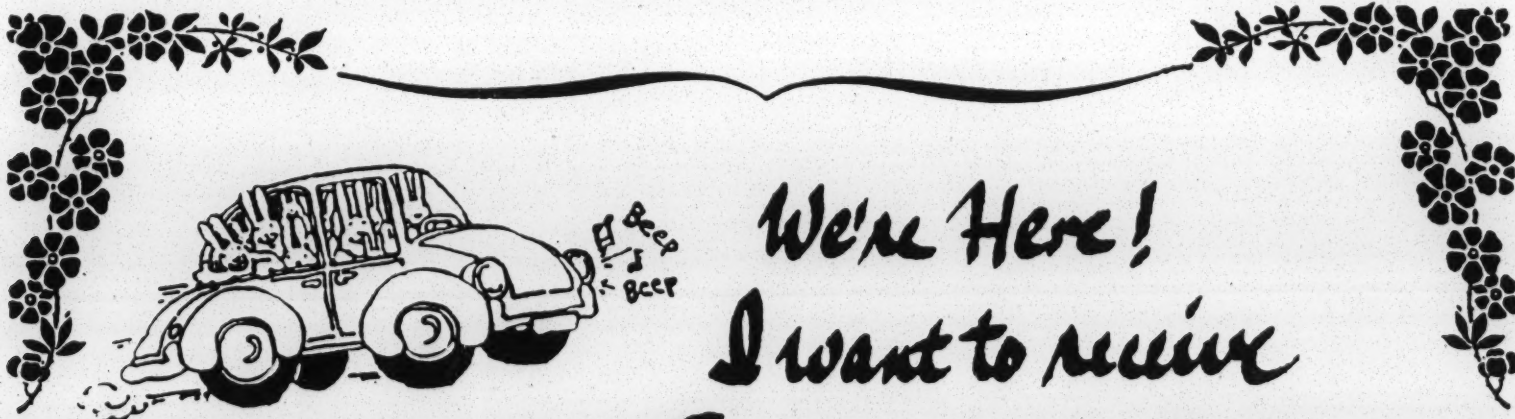


Would you like us to keep (re)creating The Serpent's Tail for the seasonal transitions? Here at the core (editorial board) we are finding the \$\$ side becoming too much for just us to bear. We are weaving a sustaining web. We ask your support in strengthening the connections...

Receive 4 seasonal journals for a minimum donation of \$10.00. Back issues are still available! (Samhain, 1989, Yule 1989, Spring Equinox 1990 and Summer, 1990) \$2.00 each.

We especially need access to any kind of printing or photocopying equipment. Any other donation you're moved to send will be appreciated and acknowledged.

We live in Milwaukee and our reach is universal.



We're Here!
I want to receive
The Serpent's Tail

Link me on with the _____ season!

Send to: _____

Address: _____

Send to: _____

Address: _____

Amount enclosed \$ _____
(Sorry, can't bill you)

Please send check or money order to K. Clark at P.O. Box 07437, Milwaukee, WI 53207

